



# CATAWBA COUNTY

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**Department of Social Services**

## PRESS RELEASE

**Thursday, August 29, 2002**

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### **Freeze on Health Choice Enrollment Canceled**

North Carolina will not have to freeze North Carolina Health Choice enrollment effective September 1, as previously indicated, according to a memo issued by the North Carolina Division of Medical Assistance.

The memo dated August 29, stated, "Please disregard the policy implementation instructions in [Family and Children's Medicaid] Change 03-03. Continue to register AND APPROVE NC Health Choice applications for eligible families taken on and after September 1, 2002. The Eligibility Information System (EIS) will accept and process these applications as usual."

Health Choice was designed to insure children whose families earn too much money to qualify for Medicaid, but cannot afford private health insurance. The program covers health care and medicine, dental, vision and hearing care, special needs and mental health care.

Depending on their incomes, some families enrolled in the program pay an annual enrollment fee and make small co-payments for doctor visits and prescriptions. Families with lower incomes pay no out-of-pocket expenses for care.

In 1998, when the program began, the state estimated about 71,000 children would be eligible for the program. The number of children covered by NC Health Choice reached 85,563 as of August 29, 2002.

Health Choice cost about \$130 million in fiscal year 2001-2002, with the federal government paying almost 75 percent of the bill and the state paying the rest. A freeze in the program would have meant losing the federal funds.

To apply for Health Choice, contact the department of social services in your county:

Alexander County: (828) 632-1080.

Burke County: (828) 874-1004.

Caldwell County: (828) 757-1180

Catawba County: (828) 695-5712.

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